

BirdLife International and several other institutions are running a campaign to save the lesser flamingos and maintain the integrity of Lake Natron.

In November 1996, the BirdLife organisation in Tanzania (WCST) made a submission to the government's national environment management council (NEMC) that: "in the eyes of conservationists, the implementation of this project will result in an ecosystem catastrophe in the long run". Since that initial submission, WCST has maintained constant opposition to the project plans.

In early 2007, several institutions in Eastern Africa formed the Lake Natron Consultative Group to raise awareness of the threats that face Lake Natron and the lesser flamingos. The group now has 31 member institutions covering east, central and southern Africa as well as North America. A petition against the soda plant has been signed by more than 2,000 people around the globe.

In October, BirdLife International began a global campaign to help save Lake Natron. Called 'Think Pink, Save Lesser Flamingos', the campaign is aimed at drawing the world's attention to the threat that the species faces if the soda ash plant is built. As part of the campaign, conservation organisations, eminent conservationists, flamingo experts and concerned individuals from more than 40 countries have written to the Tanzanian government protesting at the project plans.

At a public meeting more than 90 per cent of those attending objected to the project, with the strongest objections coming from a delegation of 12 community members from villages around Lake Natron. The RSPB also presented the opposition from the Tanzania Association of Tour Operators. During the meeting revised plans for the soda plant were presented, including a shift in the site of the plant 32 km away.

In March, Lake Natron Resources Limited wrote to the NEMC to withdraw the current environmental impact assessment (EIA) from consideration. They said that they would commission a new EIA for the new site. But the ultimate fate of East Africa's lesser flamingos is still unsure.

## Televisuals

Germany's national research council has started posting weekly videoblogs in the hope of reaching young audiences. **Michael Gross** tunes in.

The Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has never been regarded as very hip. Less glamorous than the Max Planck Society, which runs institutes of world fame, the DFG distributes government grants to established researchers in universities and other institutions, like the UK research councils. The average 14–19 year old German has probably never heard of the organisation, and even academics will only start acknowledging the DFG's existence at the point when they have to start applying for their own research funds to top up their institutional budgets.

All this is about to change, however, as the DFG aims to win over the hearts and minds of the YouTube generation with its very own brand of video clips. Last month, the organisation launched 'DFG Science TV', a web-based project based on videoblogs following ten separate, DFG-funded research projects with weekly updates over three months. The rich mix of topics spans across the sciences and humanities, ranging from dinosaurs to robots, ancient temples to modern megacities, and from materials science to conservation research.

In the series 'Animal Invasion', for instance, researchers from the University of Konstanz investigate the effects of invading species on the ecosystem of Lake Constance. In particular, the scientists are looking at the 'killer shrimp' *Dikerogammarus villosus*, a species originating from around the Black Sea region, which has been causing havoc in freshwater environments across Germany.

Speaking at the launch of the project, DFG president Matthias Kleiner emphasized the need to reach out to the younger generation. "For Germany as a research location, it is particularly important that young people become familiarised with the methods and results of modern research and science at an early age. We need the interest of young people in order to ensure that we have researchers in the future. We

must explore new methods in order to convey that research is exciting," Kleiner said.

Frauke Kraas, a professor of geography whose work on megacities is featured in one of the videoblogs, is equally excited about the project. "It is important that young people in particular have the chance to understand what social change processes transpire, how science works to this end and, above all, what the consequences are for their own lives. DFG Science TV offers an excellent opportunity for achieving this. The research problems as well as the work of the scientists become clear and concrete and a reference is established to daily life," she said.

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The researchers, who pursue their investigations in various locations around the globe, make their own video recordings and submit around 30 minutes of raw footage per week. Professional TV producers then edit the material down to three minutes in length. Their professionalism prevails in the final product — many of the clips look more like a TV documentary cut into pieces than the amateurish material that YouTube customers appear to be addicted to.

So is DFG Science TV here to stay and to rival the ubiquitous offerings of cute kittens and dancing hamsters? The people behind the show can't tell yet, but have hinted that, if successful, this new channel for science communication may become a permanent institution. DFG are very pleased with the initial reactions. By the end of last month more than 10,000 separate users had viewed more than 100,000 page impressions. The team are hoping the project will continue after the pilot phase but a detailed evaluation will not be carried out until July.

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Link: [www.dfg-science-tv.de](http://www.dfg-science-tv.de)